

عرائس محجبات والبطاقات البريدية الاوروبية

Brides in Hijab and European Postcards

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Abstract

European Postcards during the Nineteenth Century present images of Arab brides and Muslim women smoking hookah. This has led to distorted Western stereotypes of Arab and Muslim women throughout the course of Western cultural history. Such images are visualised in European postcards to be sold as objects of ridicule. This paper highlights the historical records and the fictional narrative of Arabic weddings and European tourists' postcards of Arabic brides in fancy wedding costumes in addition to Muslim women spending their life in states of indolence, drinking coffee and smoking hookah. This paper offers a post-colonial reading of the narrative concerning Muslim brides in fictional texts like the Wedding Chapter in the novel *Hadith Isa Ibn Hisham* published in 1907 and the historical role of existed European Colonial photographers in International museums and worldwide digital archives.

Key words: Muslim women, cultural history, colonialism, Photography, novel

الخلاصة

تظهر البطاقات البريدية الأوروبية خلال القرن التاسع عشر صورًا لعرائس عربيات ونساء مسلمات في اوضاع اجتماعية غريبة وخاصة عندما يدخلن النرجيلة. وقد أدى هذا إلى تشويه الصور النمطية الغربية للمرأة العربية والمسلمة طوال مسار التاريخ الثقافي الغربي.

يتم تصوير الصور في تلك البطاقات البريدية الأوروبية لبيعها بدافع اثارة السخرية . تسلط هذه الورقة البحثية الضوء على السجلات التاريخية الحقيقية والسرد القصصي الخيالي لحفلات الزفاف العربية وبطاقات السائحين الأوروبيين البريدية للعرائس العربيات في أزياء الزفاف الفاخرة والنساء المسلمات اللواتي يقضين حياتهن في حالة من الكسل وشرب القهوة وتدخين النرجيلة. تقدم هذه الورقة قراءة ما بعد الاستعمار للسرد المتعلق بالزفاف في النصوص الخيالية مثل فصل الزفاف في رواية حديث عيسى بن هشام المنشور في عام ١٩٠٧ والدور التاريخي للمصورين الاستعماريين الأوروبيين لصورهم الحقيقية المعروضة في المتاحف الدولية والسجلات العالمية في الارشفة الرقمية .

الكلمات المفتاحية: المرأة المسلمة، التاريخ الثقافي، الاستعمار، التصوير الفوتوغرافي، الرواية

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Some photographs and paintings reflect images of cultural conflicts that could be hidden in different layers of meanings and social concepts. Sometimes these images are meant to be funny for some and painful for others. This paper highlights the use of Muslim women photos in photographic postcards, paintings and visual fictional images in narrative forms to represent a painful set of deceptive cultural oriental images showing Muslim women as nothing but a commodity to be sold to the Western observers in the course of colonial history of the Turkish and Arab lands.

I- Bridal photographs of Oriental Muslim women and Smoking

One of the defining conceptual meaning of the picture of Muslim women on logo brands in Nineteenth century Smoking industry is the eroticised harem concept as Professor Luthmer observed in 1894, "Smoking concubines reveal to us the secret of the harem". Such images show an oriental beauty offering a western observer a cigarette. In addition certain fictional narrative images of Muslim brides in their oriental costumes offer Westerners an opportunity to escape to an exotic world away from their daily routine life. Western tourists discovered the Middle East in the caricature of eroticised fantasy. Western travellers throughout the colonial history searched for a sexualised caricature image of the Orient.

The above cultural concepts are represented clearly in postcards of the American brand using smoking packages with the oriental notions and Muslim women images like the Turkish smoking blend "Fatima" during 1917-1919 (Khattak, 2008) . There are two marketing tools are combined in selling oriental women images in any western production : the exotic and sex. American toothpastes and bottle of waters with the brand "kalodant" in 1914 are also covered with images of the Arab lands like camel's saddle against a background of a pyramid in the desert. Images of Muslim woman veiled in her balcony on advertisements images with her red mouth and a text that reads "never disappointing" suggests the female that is distant and unapproachable. Such tradition in Western products at the early twentieth century goes back to a hundred years earlier with Nineteenth century tourists visiting Arab lands unable to see closely Muslim women due to the harem privacy and the strict Arabic tradition of dealing with outsiders visiting their houses. Instead of presenting real images of these women, European tourists presented a set of photographic images of models playing such roles. Veils, Arabic bride wedding fancy costumes and the bare skin of hands, legs or breasts became distorted caricature images of Muslim women. This is what Bernard Debarbieux calls as the eroticism to imagination as he has observed: "the imagination at work in Orientalism is clearly that of the European

who imagine remotely, therefore in the absence of what the Orient and the Oriental are” (Debarbieux, 2019). The imagined geographies and the imagined social spaces led to caricature images of any definitions of the Orient. Muslim women are the core of these imaginary horizons in human geography. Hookah in the hands of a Muslim woman becomes an erotic signifier and very common images in photographic postcards despite the historical fact that oriental women were hardly actually smoke during Nineteenth century.

Bridal photographs of Oriental Muslim women are strongly mingled with smoking. Fatima, the Turkish blend cigarette package shows clearly the red lips behind the white veil and holding a cigarette box wearing jewellery bracelets and the text reads “ Stands alone in a class by itself– as most acceptable: always satisfying, never disappointing”. This Odalisque’s eroticizing Cigarette is suggesting smoking as a deviant connotation with an erotic meaning. This is also used in the theme of the photo package of Dimitrino &Co Cigarette where an Arab women with coloured skin and long black hair sitting on a sofa and smoking a cigarette. The women is dressed in an Egyptian fancy red and yellow costume with a red folklore hat and wearing several jewellery necklaces and bracelets. The sofa is placed on a red carpet overlooking the Nile river and Pyramids on the desert. The box text reads “Cigarette of the Orient Cairo Egypt”. Such images carry the notion of seduction.

Western cultural concepts reflect the eroticisation of tourist’s destinations in Middle East and also a cultural construction of a preconceived idea on the Orient as an image of sexualised society. According to many Nineteenth century anthropologists travelling to Egypt was a way of exploring the unfamiliar Orient as an academic project. The Nineteenth century anthropologist scientists Jean Leon Gerome lived for four months on a sailboat on the Nile in Egypt and tried to learn Arabic language. But

his project turned to be pseudo- scientific study of variety of Arabic personalities. He painted males and females from Arabic and Ottoman races with an Oriental touch.

These paintings that used as postcards back in Europe, presented richly decorated textiles with shiny gold embroidery and silky blue fabrics and textures of black veil in contrast to the female Circassian's fair skin. He actually searched Egyptian bazaars for specimens of authentic clothing . But such painting offered only the fantasy not the reality of the Orient. Turkish costumes of caftans with tight fitting jewelled clasps were brought back to Europe and were adored by trend fashionable Western women. This also goes back to Napoleon's campaign in Egypt in 1798 when Mameluke tunics were brought back to European fashions. (Masquelier, 2009).The turban came to fashion throughout the Nineteenth century as many Western tourists took portraits of themselves wearing the fez in Eastern fancy costumes.

Dreaming of the Orient and romancing over Muslim women stereotypes. Entering the magic world of the harem like their owner the Sultan was the impression left on the Western beholders with erotic impact as they looked at the iconic paintings of presenting the Orient like Eugene Delacroix's (1798-1863) "Femmes d Alger" (1834) and paintings of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) "Bain Turque" (1863) and "The Turkish Bath" (1862). The influence of such paintings is the same of all photographic postcards regarding Muslim women as commodity and male products. But also as a cultural concept of the otherness as such images came in contrast to the Victorian European women dress costumes fully covering female bodies with high necklines and long sleeves, loose locks tied in a trimmed bun. Consequently in England the word Turkish became synonymous with naughtiness suggesting the meaning of indecency.

Photography is the medium that was supposed to give credibility to the tourists' experiences in the Arab lands. A picture postcard would bring the exotic Orient to the

Western family living rooms. The French Academy of Sciences in 1839 started the project of documenting “exact and rapid” copies of ancient Egyptian monuments. Hence a newly expedition set off for Egypt under the Orientalist painter Horace Vernet (1789–1863) with the mission to collect Egyptian antiquities. This early use of photography made the Orient a “standard speciality” (Timothy, 1988) . Pictorial settings of Egyptian women brought the Western as well as the Arab males’ perspective of a visual access to respectable Muslim women who were not available in social life. A veiled women on a donkey back has become a truthful daily occurrence documented in photographic postcards. But such focus on this scenery is only to bring the exotic effect to the Western beholders.

II– European Artists facing Muslim Women in fictional texts and historical records

Hadith Isa ibn Hisham first appeared in a serial weekly publication under the title “Fatra min al-Zaman” (A Period of Time) between April 1898 and August 1903. The essays were then collected and published in book form in 1907. A second version of the revised edition appeared in 1912 and a third one in 1923. In 1927 the Egyptian Ministry of Education decided to adopt the book as a school textbook and asked al-Muwaylihi to prepare a fourth revision of the work, including the Second Journey and the exclusion of controversial episodes where the writer attacks political and religious institutions of Egyptian social life, as well as anti-British and anti-government passages. Al-Muwaylihi agreed on these censorship terms and prepared this fourth edition. This revised edition appeared in the following publications: the fifth edition in 1935, the sixth in 1943, the seventh in 1947, *Al-Halal* Book in two volumes in 1959, the National Publishing House in Cairo in 1964, *Dar Al-Turath* (The Heritage) Publishing House in Beirut in 1969 and *Dar al-Shaab* (The People) Publishing House

in Egypt in 1969. The subsequent publication of the work gives the idea of its tremendous reception by the reading public over the course of time.

Hadith Isa Ibn Hisam opens with a figure rising from death and coming from a previous historical era of political nationalist resistance, the reign of Muhammad Ali. As the text has it, a grave had opened and a man of dignity and noble birth appeared, speaking in Arabic and Turkish, ordering for his clothes and horse to be brought from his house. The text opens with Isa's dream to show the layers of fancy and reality being intermingled throughout the narrative.

Al-Muwaylihi's use of urban space and its social and historical realities is part of worldwide nineteenth-century architectural theories. These theories demonstrate the idea of synthesizing histories and architectural landscapes. According to such ideas, Cairo connects the Islamic world to the ancient world. The prominent Victorian architectural historian, James Fergusson (1808–1886) believed Cairo minarets are connected to the built culture of ancient civilizations. He points out that the Cairo landscape:

Rests on the fact of its being a modern reproduction of the style of the same ancient places of Nineveh and Babylon, using the same thick walls of imperfectly burned brick, and covering them with the same brilliant coloured decorations of glazed and painted tiles and bricks, carrying this species of decoration to an extent never attempted in other parts of the world.

(Crinson, 1996, p. 43).

Bringing the Islamic world and the ancient one together makes Cairo's streets and buildings representative of national identity. It may be noted here, that this is a central idea in the theory of John Ruskin (1819–1900) who refers to landscape as a key characteristic of nation. In "The Poetry of Architecture" Ruskin describes how

landscape characterises nationhood in Europe: portraying the cottages of England, France and Italy as typical. Similarly, with Egypt, its landscape and cityscapes express a national spirit. As he observes in Egypt Western tourists

find a climate bringing a long-lasting state of heavy sensational excitement, fostered by great magnificence of natural phenomena, and increased by the general custom of exposing the body continually to the sun, so that, as in a dreaming fever, people imagine inaccurate beings and features moving and living in the quiet objects of the space. (Ruskin, 1903-1912). Ruskin's theory of Landscape and Ethnicity is significant for its attempt to show the extent to which spatial representation suggests so much about the cultural transactions between East and West. In *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin draws an association between art and nation. To convey his impression of Byzantine art, he uses terms such as "mystic", "mythical", "symbolic", having "want of freedom", "petrification", "formalism" and "monotony". This linguistic characterisation is set in comparison to the way he describes Islamic art as "exquisite", "fantastic" having "excitement", "enchantment", and "evanescence". For him, the two cultural traditions are competing with each other and, from the ninth to eleventh century, the architecture of Venice and Cairo were both representatives of Byzantine and Isla.

The clash of East and West is pictured in the wedding chapter. Following Western customs, the family invites all the influential people including the *ulama* to their wedding party in big hotels, despite the fact that they never socialize with them. By doing so they gain fame and prestige.

They also give money and invitation tickets to the hotel interpreters to distribute to the tourists. The greedy interpreters sell the free invitation tickets to the tourists, who think it is an Oriental custom to pay a fixed price to attend the wedding. The bridegroom is honoured with the tourists' presence; he rushes to give them a friendly

welcome and places them above all influential people and serves them all night, forgetting about any other attendees. He takes the wives of the tourists to see his harem (women of the family and of kin relation) and his pride. The female tourists take with them boxes which the Pasha thinks are gifts to the bride, but turn out to be equipment to take pictures of the Egyptian women in their fancy wedding dresses. The tourists joke at these pictures of Muslim women and sell them back in Europe as objects of ridicule.

The depiction of Muslim women in a Muslim harem in nineteenth-century paintings badly affected Western opinions of the culture of the middle-east. These paintings were viewed as realistic portrayals of Islamic societies. According to Shahin Khattak, Western viewers seemed to ignore the fact that imaginative qualities of such paintings do not provide a realistic view of social behaviour, but reflect the imagination of the artist. The result was a distorted image of Muslims. Paintings such as the “Odalisque” by Ingres, as Khattak has pointed out, were often inspired by a non-Oriental source; moreover the artist drew the frivolous and eccentric harem image out of his own imagination. Ingres started a trend with this painting that was followed by Renoir and Matisse. This led to a general nineteenth-century Western view that Muslim women spent their life in states of indolence, drinking coffee and smoking hookah. These views were transferred in photographic postcards. With the absence of witnesses this unrealistic erotic image of the inner harem was taken for granted in the West.

Westernizing pretensions are also reflected in the chapter concerning Al-Giza. The Great Pyramid at Giza was the viewing platform for the European tourists. The Bedouin Egyptians would carry the Europeans on their shoulders to the top to observe the view. This was also a subject of imitation among members of the Egyptian upper-middle-class. But the main theme of al-Muwaylihi’s Al-Giza chapter is how Egyptians deal with their own past – that is, how a nostalgia for a past marked

by class distinction, and an aristocracy which kept the hierarchy of social order, can hinder any attempt to build a modern society.

Describing events in multiple contexts in visualized postcards and literary texts can bring contrasting viewpoints of reality producing conflicting reports that cannot be resolved. This cultural conflict continues to influence our perception of the course of human history. The history of the Arab world's intercultural relations with the West has been recorded on much tension and social struggle against colonial domination. Prominent Arabic authors throughout the Nineteenth Century were admiring Western ideas but at the same time were disappointed on the Western schemes of stereotyping Arabic societies. Many educational reforms enabled Arabic women to enter the literary societies and to participate in intellectual life. But this image of such Arabic women is hardly represented in the Western arts. There is a juxtaposing of subjective and fanciful images of Arab women in most of the oriental paintings and postcards in Europe. Means in Western media can vary but the content is always the same concerning the cultural conceptualization of Arab Muslim women. Terms like "erotic", "primitive", "ignorant", "slave traders" among other many offensive terms describe Arabs and Muslims actually for both genders. This cultural perception is rooted in the Western terminology concerning the religion of Islam as Edward Said writes:

The term Islam as it is used today seems to mean one simple thing, but in fact is part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam. Today Islam is peculiarly traumatic news in the West. During the past few years, especially since events in Iran caught European and American attention so strongly, the media have therefore covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it known. But

this coverage is misleadingly full, and a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material. In many instances Islam has licensed not only patent inaccuracy, but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural, and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility (Agh, 2025, p. 2).

The contempt towards Arabic women during the Nineteenth Century was originated in the Victorian religious concepts concerning the faith of Islam as being “satanic”, and the prophet of Islam as being the “Antichrist”. Muslim women were inferior and more like beautiful dolls to be exhibited to entertain Western observers. This dehumanization of Muslim women and presenting images of them as belly dancers and chantress of magic spells was a pattern to be followed in many forms of literature as well as Arts. Critical appreciation of Islamic culture shows disagreement and disapproval that continues over centuries and leads to the materialization of a new trend in Orientalism.

According to Leila Ahmed, Islamic institutions and modes of believes form the core discourses defining women’s position in Muslim communities. (Ahmed, 1992). But the colonial powers set the cultural discourses to determine the position of Muslim women as tools to allocate the “Other” in cultural conflicts. This was an attempt to subvert the social status of the colonized Arab nation. This rhetoric was the incarnation of European chauvinism.

On the other hand, the historical records implement the fact that Muslims were part of the Victorian Britain. According to Jamie Gilham, Muslims lived in London, Manchester, Merseyside and many other cities in Nineteenth Century Britain. They were part of the everyday English life and the national imperial course of history.

(Gilham, 2023). The Liverpool Muslim Institute was established in 1887 by Abdullah Quilliam to unite Muslims in Britain and pave the way for valuable multi cultural transactions prior to the waves of economic immigration during the last decades of the Nineteenth Century and the beginning of the Twentieth Century. The institute was also the first historically recorded mosque in Britain. Liverpool Muslim Institute published in the basement of its building *The Crescent* , a weekly magazine in 1893 besides *The Islamic World* , a monthly magazine. Such publications attracted European readers and then reached out to an increasingly international readership across twenty countries.

During the Nineteenth Century, Islam shaped social attitudes and brought images of Muslim women beyond the common stereotypes. The ethnographic portrayal of these women emerged as lively and hard working. Yet such factual accounts never end the dilemma of the distorted and misleading artistic and literary forms of portraying Muslim women.

III- Conclusion

The Western depiction of Muslim brides and Arab women in the artistic forms during the Nineteenth Century is part of the geo-political reading of the colonized world. The East- West cultural interactions have been marked by many misconceptions and counter- discourses. The image women play a fundamental role in such cultural issues. Western media presents inaccurate presumption about the Islamic faith. This led to distorted conceptions of the identity of the Muslim woman. Western artists have been interested in the exotic East for centuries. Middle Eastern themes are found in biblical paintings as well as Baroque and French Rococo paintings. Yet in Nineteenth Century images of the East specifically that of Arabs and Muslims have become a political manifesto. Some artists visited the Arab lands but many of them created the Orient in their European studios. The term “Islamic Art” bears the shortcomings as an

art-historiographical term. The commercial enterprise decides the objects of what is called Islamic artefacts. Women are considered the force of life and in the colonial history of art and literary narrative; Muslim women constitute the vitality of any scholarly readings concerning the intercultural transactions. British Museum showcases in our own times depict the unacknowledged influence of the Eastern cultural conceptions on the West in an attempt to reverse the passive erotic portrayal of the Orient. Many contemporary Arab and Muslim female artists have contributed in this exhibition defying Orientalist portrayal of women. This is an attempt to highlight the importance of the ongoing dialogue with regard to cultural depiction of the Muslim women. Hopefully there will be many others participating in presenting a fare unbiased image of the Muslim women.

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